

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0532

INFO AMEMBASSY DARESSALAAM

AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

AMEMBASSY MAPUTO

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PINS, RH

SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH TWO RHODESIAN BUSINESSMEN

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: TWO RELATIVELY AFFLUENT RHODESIAN BROTHERS OF INDIAN EXTRACTION RECENTLY DISCUSSED ECONOMIC, POLITICAL, AND SECURITY SITUATION WITH EMBOFF. AS OWNERS OF GENERAL STORE IN BULAWAYO, BROTHERS ARE PARTICULARLY DISTURBED BY WEAKNESS OF RHODESIAN ECONOMY DUE TO LABOR AND RAW MATERIALS SHORTAGES AND EROSION OF CONSUMER CONFIDENCE. SECURITY SITUATION HAS DETERIORATED TO POINT THAT CIVILIAN CARS MUST OFTEN TRAVEL IN CONVOY UNDER MILITARY ESCORT. BROTHERS SOMEWHAT SURPRISINGLY FAVOR NKOMO AMONG BLACK NATIONALIST LEADERS, AND THEY BELIEVE AN "INTERNAL SOLUTION" BETWEEN SMITH AND MUZOREWA WOULD LEAD TO CIVIL WAR. ACCORDING TO BROTHERS, MOST RHODESIAN WHITES ARE WILLING TO WORK UNDER ANY POLITICAL SYSTEM WHICH WILL USE THEIR BUSINESS AND TECHNICAL SKILLS AND PERMIT THEM TO MAINTAIN A FAVORABLE PLACE IN ECONOMY OF ZIMBABWE, END SUMMARY.

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2. RHODESIAN ECONOMIC SITUATION: BROTHERS, WHOSE PARENTS IMMIGRATED FROM INDIA SEVENTY YEARS AGO, WERE BORN IN RHODESIA, HAVE NO REAL TIES WITH INDIA, AND INTEND TO STICK IT OUT DESPITE RAPID DETERIORATION OF ECONOMIC SITUATION. ACCORDING TO BROTHERS, THEIR GENERAL STORE BUSINESS HAS BEEN SEVERELY DAMAGED BY GENERAL WEAKNESS OF RHODESIAN ECONOMY. MANY FACTORIES REPORTEDLY WORK ONLY THREE DAYS

PER WEEK BECAUSE OF SHORTAGES OF LABOR AND RAW MATERIALS. RAW MATERIALS ARE IN SHORT SUPPLY BECAUSE OF ECONOMIC SANCTIONS AND SHORTAGE OF FOREIGN EXCHANGE. GASOLINE IS SAID TO BE IN VERY SHORT SUPPLY SO THAT OWNERS OF PERSONAL VEHICLES MAY PURCHASE ONLY FIVE GALLONS PER MONTH WHILE VEHICLES USED FOR BUSINESS PURPOSES ARE ALLOCATED 15 GALLONS PER MONTH.

2. LABOR SHORTAGE: RHODESIAN LABOR SUPPLY HAS BEEN VIRTUALLY EXHAUSTED BY CALL-UPS OF RESERVISTS FOR MILITARY DUTY. ONE OF THE BROTHERS, WHO IS FORTY-THREE YEARS OLD, HAS BEEN ON CALL-UP SCHEDULE OF SIX WEEKS ON DUTY, FOLLOWED BY SIX WEEKS AT HOME, AND THEN SIX WEEKS IN FIELD AGAIN. THE OTHER BROTHER HAS HEART CONDITION WHICH EXEMPTS HIM FROM DUTY. RESERVIST BROTHER TOLD EMBOFF THAT HIS UNIT IS USUALLY ASSIGNED TO GUARD WORK CREWS IMPROVING ROADS IN BUSH. DURING HIS LAST CALL-UP, ATTACK BY EIGHT WELL-ARMED GUERRILLAS ALMOST COST RESERVIST BROTHER HIS LIFE. SINCE END OF HIS LAST STINT OF MILITARY DUTY, RESERVIST BROTHER HAS BEEN TRAVELLING IN SOUTH AFRICA AND BOTSWANA TRYING TO AVOID ANOTHER CALL-UP.

3. IMPACT ON BUSINESS: BROTHERS CLAIM THAT ABSENCE OF KEY PEOPLE ON RESERVE DUTY HAS HAD SEVERE ADVERSE IMPACT ON THEIR OWN BUSINESS AND RHODESIAN ECONOMY IN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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GENERAL. MOREOVER, CONSUMER CONFIDENCE AND PURCHASING IS VERY LOW, PARTICULARLY AMONG WHITES WHO ARE HESITANT TO TIE UP THEIR ASSETS IN GOODS WHICH COULD NOT BE READILY TAKEN OUT IN AN EMERGENCY.

4. SECURITY SITUATION: ACCORDING TO BROTHERS, SECURITY SITUATION IS DETERIORATING ALARMINGLY. FOR EXAMPLE, TRAINS ARE PRECEDED DOWN TRACKS BY DUMMY CARS SO THAT MAINES PLANTED BY GUERRILLAS WILL BE EXPLODED PREMATURELY. AMBUSHES OF PRIVATE CARS HAVE BECOME SO PREVALENT THAT CONVOYS UNDER MILITARY ESCORT ARE OFTEN FORMED IN PARTICULARLY DANGEROUS AREAS. TRAVELLERS FIND OUT FROM POLICE WHEN CONVOYS WILL DEPART AND GATHER AT APPOINTED TIME TO JOIN RHODESIAN ARMY JEEPS WHICH THEN SERVE AS LEAD AND TAIL VEHICLES OF CONVOY. VIRTUALLY NO ONE TRAVELS ON ROADS AFTER DARK.

5. POLITICAL SITUATION: BROTHERS PREDICTED THAT RHODESIA ACTION PARTY WOULD TAKE NO MORE THAN FOUR OR FIVE SEATS IN AUGUST 31 ELECTION. THEY BELIEVE IT WILL WIN SEATS ONLY WHERE IT HAS CHOSEN VERY POPULAR LOCAL CANDIDATES WHO COULD WIN WHATEVER THEIR PARTY AFFILIATION.

ACCORDING TO BROTHERS, RAP'S HARD-LINE POLICIES ACTUALLY ENJOY LITTLE SUPPORT AMONG WHITES WHO ARE SICK OF WAR AND CONVINCED THAT BLACK MAJORITY GOVERNMENT IS INEVITABLE.

6. WITH REGARD TO BLACK NATIONALIST LEADERS, BOTH BROTHERS SOMEWHAT SURPRISINGLY FAVORED NKOMO. WHEN ASKED ABOUT NKOMO'S MARXISTS LEANINGS, BROTHERS REPLIED THAT HE HAS ADOPTED MARXIST RHETORIC AND ACCEPTED SOVIET AID ONLY BECAUSE HE HAS NO ALTERNATIVE. THEY BELIEVE THAT NKOMO REALIZES IMPORTANCE OF WHITES (INCLUDING INDIANS) TO RHODESIAN ECONOMY, AND THAT, ONCE STRUGGLE WITH SMITH IS OVER, HE WILL MODIFY OR JETTISON HIS MARXIST ORIENTATION. TURNING TO MUZOREWA, BROTHERS ACKNOWLEDGED THAT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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HE HAS WIDESPREAD SUPPORT AMONG BLACKS, BUT HE HAS, UNFORTUNATELY, NOT ASSOCIATED HIMSELF WITH "FREEDOM FIGHTERS". ACCORDING TO BROTHERS, AN "INTERNAL SOLUTION" BETWEEN SMITH AND MUZOREWA WOULD BE REJECTED BY GUERRILLA FORCES AND WOULD PROBABLY LEAD TO CIVIL WAR.

7. COMMENT: RHODESIANS LIKE THESE TWO BROTHERS WILL BE CRUCIAL TO SUCCESS OF ANY BLACK MAJORITY GOVERNMENT WHICH MIGHT SUCCEED SMITH REGIME. THEY AND OTHER NON-BLACK BUSINESSMEN AND TECHNICIANS WILL HAVE TO BE ACCEPTED AND EFFECTIVELY USED IF WIDESPREAD AND SEVERE ECONOMIC COLLAPSE IS TO BE AVOIDED. BROTHERS ATTACHMENT TO RHODESIA AS THEIR HOME AND THEIR DETERMINATION TO PERSIST THROUGH CURRENT DIFFICULTIES ARE STRIKING. THEY CLEARLY INTEND TO BE PART OF NEW ZIMBABWE, AND THEIR ATTITUDE IS PROBABLY SHARED BY MANY SKILLED WHITES WHOSE TALENTS WILL BE DESPERATELY NEEDED AFTER INDEPENDENCE.
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